

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

“Demand and Supply”

House of Douthwaite Garland, TX 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. (Gen. 22:7-8)

Well, I’m no economist, but I’d say we’ve all learned a little something lately about the law of supply and demand. Just a few weeks ago, *none* of us was worried about our toilet paper supply. Then, all of a sudden, you couldn’t find any Charmin anywhere! I hear it’s *still* hard to come by. But it’s not just toilet paper. One article in a recent edition of the Dallas Morning News described a sudden increase in demand for all *manner* of goods at a local Sprouts. One of my favorite lines talked about how, over in the produce section, even sturdy items, like onions and potatoes, were gone, “except for a few bruised sweet potatoes, and a single lonely yam.”

The Law of Demand

It’s not quite a one-for-one, but we see something of this law in today’s Old Testament lesson. We read there that, after the birth of Isaac, the son of the promise God made to Abraham way back in Genesis 15, God tested Abraham, saying to him, “Abraham...Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen. 22:1, 2). That is an extremely high demand! This was Abraham’s son, his *only* son, the son God had said He would give him in order to make him a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:3). Abraham had *trusted* that promise, even when his wife Sarah had remained barren for decades. But now that Isaac had been born and was grown and that promise was finally getting some traction, Abraham is told, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and kill him, kill the promise, kill *everything*, and fear, love, and trust in *Me* above all things.”

Can you imagine? Can you imagine being asked to sacrifice something so dear? To obey God to the point of *perfection*, at the cost of absolutely *everything*?

I daresay we can’t. Oh, we’ve made sacrifices. First, it was no gatherings of over 250 people. Then it was 50, then 10, then *none*, with last Sunday’s shelter-in-place order for Dallas County. We’ve had to sacrifice vacations, play dates, birthday parties, not to mention the great and irreplaceable joy of coming together physically as Christ’s Body to receive His gifts, including no less than His true body and blood. But, as the author of Hebrews says, “you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood” (12:4). We’ve sacrificed a lot over the past few weeks, but not everything.

And everything is precisely what God demands. Jesus wasn’t kidding when He said, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and

children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). Now, of course, He didn’t mean that children should start mouthing off to their parents, or that parents should despise and exasperate their children. The Fourth Commandment still applies. But so does the First, and that’s the one Jesus calls the greatest, saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). Obedience to all the other commandments flows from this one, “You shall have no other gods.” *Failure* to keep this first and greatest commandment means failure to keep all the rest.

God told Abraham to “hate” his son Isaac by offering him up for a burnt offering. He said this to *test* him, to see if he truly had no other gods before Him, the one true God. Remember, our “gods” can be anything, whatever we set our hearts on and put our trust in (LC I 3). But the Lord our God is a jealous God. He doesn’t want to share us, for “It is He who made us, and we are His” (Ps. 100:3).

But, in order to belong to Him, we must be *perfect*, as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). That’s how carefully God wants us to keep His commandments, in thoughts, words, and deeds. “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10). And the guilty cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus says, “Whoever loves his life *loses* it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25). That is an extremely high demand!

And Scripture teaches us that no one can meet it. “They have *all* turned aside,” David sings in Psalm 14 (verse 3). “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins,” says the Preacher in Ecclesiastes 7 (verse 20). “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” the apostle Paul writes in Romans 3 (verse 23). And 1 John 1 says that “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (verse 8). There’s no way around it: We are sinners. We have not loved God with all our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are guilty of the *whole law*, not even coming *close* to having what we need to meet God’s righteous demand; to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect. All we’ve got in the equivalent of a near-empty produce section: a few bruised sweet potatoes and a single lonely yam.

God Himself Will Provide

Now, to be clear, Abraham was *not* a perfect man. The faith he had he received from God as a gift. He could not believe in Jesus Christ, His Lord, or come to Him any more than we can. But the Holy Spirit called him, too, by the Gospel, which he received in that original promise of blessing (Gen. 12:3). And by that faith, writes the author of Hebrews, “Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac” (11:17). He offered him up with the understanding that, one way or another, *God Himself would provide*; He would not go back on His promise. But neither could Abraham ignore God’s demand. He could only trust that God, in His mercy, would keep His Word and provide a way for his son to *live*.

And, well, you know the rest of the story. When Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son,

the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do

anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

And not just for Abraham. In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus says that Abraham saw Jesus’ day and was glad (John 8:56). He saw that, in spite of God’s incredibly high demand, the righteous requirement of the Law, which no mere mortal can supply, God *Himself* would provide a lamb for the sacrifice (Gen. 22:8); that He would step in and supply what we sinners lack: perfect fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

So, when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, Jesus, very God of very God, to be perfect *for* us. “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Jesus’ cousin John announced (John 1:29). “This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased,” the Father proclaimed at Jesus’ Baptism (Matt. 3:17). And the apostle Peter writes that we were ransomed “not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb *without blemish or spot*” (1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus was perfect, as His heavenly Father is perfect. He alone had the supply that was needed to meet God’s righteous demand. “Surely this man was innocent!” the centurion spoke from the foot of the cross (Luke 23:47), a perfect final offering. In Christ, the law of supply and demand was *satisfied*. Just when all hope seemed lost, when the knife of God’s wrath was high in the air, ready to strike the killing blow, the Lord Himself provided. The Lamb of God was led to the slaughter, got stuck in a crown of thorns for us, that *He* might bear God’s wrath instead, die the death we deserve. That day, on the mount of Calvary, the Lord supplied no less than your salvation. He took away *your* sin and made a way for *you*, His child, to live forever.

Grace Upon Grace

So, God has supplied you with His Son, who has fulfilled all righteousness for you. He has supplied you with the gift of faith in Jesus by the working of the Holy Spirit. And now, on account of that faith, you receive even *more* gifts—forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation from your enemies. “Truly, truly, I say to you,” says Jesus in today’s Gospel lesson, “if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death” (John 8:52). And what is that word but, “Believe in Me. Trust in My provision. I lived for you, I died for you, I live *again* to supply you with even *more* than you need, grace upon grace, for life in this world, surrounded by many dangers, and for life in the world to come.

And just because we can’t meet for church on Sundays doesn’t mean you’re cut off from this grace. “I will never leave you as orphans,” He says (John 14:18). You are baptized, which means that every day for you now is a new day in Christ. We rise each morning to serve Him, knowing that yesterday’s demands, which we failed to meet, are fully supplied by Christ, the Lamb of God.

We have God’s strong Word, which is a means of grace, too, fully capable of sustaining you in your faith. “You have the words of eternal life,” Simon Peter once said to Jesus (John 6:68), and that hasn’t changed. Whether you are leading this service at

home or watching it live on the internet, the same words of eternal life are coming to you. They come to you *whenever* you hold them sacred and gladly hear and learn them. Luther writes in one of our confessional documents, “thank God, even a seven year old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd” (Smalcald Articles XII 2). The church is not a building but believers, who *daily* hear the Word of God and keep it.

These are hard times we’re living in, and the demands keep coming. But your spiritual pantry is positively *overflowing!* The Lord Himself has provided you with all that you need to live, and *then* some. God grant you His peace as we go all of us together.

In ☩ Jesus’ name. Amen. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.